

## **Excerpt**

# **Tinker Retiree Newsletter**

## **Spring/Summer 2010**

**New AMC Web Site for Space-A Travel.** Air Mobility's Command's new web site at [www.amc.af.mil/amctravel/index.asp](http://www.amc.af.mil/amctravel/index.asp) offers space available travelers an updated AMC passenger terminal contact list (complete with phone, email and web links), and more than a dozen travel documents, example letters and brochures. Hundreds of military and contracted commercial aircraft travel the world daily, delivering troops and cargo. On many of them, military personnel, retirees, and family members go along, courtesy of the AMC space-available travel program. "The web site was created to provide our customers the most accurate and up-to-date travel information available," said TSgt Steve Katsonis of the AMC passenger policy branch. "AMC never guarantees travel, and passengers need to be prepared for their trip to take more time than it would were they traveling commercial. When traveling space-A, be prepared to fly commercial if problems are encountered," Sgt Katsonis said. "Have enough money for all contingencies, and be mentally prepared for disappointment when plans don't come together."

**VA Extends Agent Orange Benefits to More Veterans.** Relying on an independent study by the Institute of Medicine, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K Shinseki established a service-connection for Vietnam veterans with three specific illnesses based on the latest evidence of an association to Agent Orange. The illnesses affected by the recent decision are B cell leukemia, such as hairy cell leukemia, Parkinson's disease and ischemic heart disease. Used in Vietnam to defoliate trees, Agent Orange left a legacy of suffering and disability that continues today. Between January 1965 and April 1970, an estimated 2.6 million military personnel were potentially exposed to sprayed Agent Orange. In practical terms, veterans who served in Vietnam during the war and who have a presumed illness do not have to prove an association between their illnesses and their military service. This presumption simplifies and speeds up the application process for benefits, according to VA officials. The secretary's decision brings to 15 the number of presumed illnesses recognized by the VA. Other illnesses previously recognized under the VA's presumption rule are: Acute and Subacute Transient Peripheral Neuropathy, AL Amyloidosis, Chloracne, Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia, Diabetes Mellitus (Type 2), Hodgkin's Disease, Multiple Myeloma, Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, Porphyria Cutanea Tarda, Prostate Cancer, Respiratory Cancers, and Soft Tissue Sarcoma (other than Osteosarcoma, Chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's Sarcoma, or Mesothelioma).

**Number Removal from ID Cards Continues.** To protect the safety of service members, retirees and their families' identity information the DOD is removing Social Security numbers from its identification cards. The removal is being done in phases. Phase One is under way and involves removing the family member's number and replacing it with XXX-XX-XXXX on the card. The sponsor's number will remain visible for now. Phase Two involves removing all printed numbers beginning later this year. Phase Three, set to begin in 2012, will involve removing numbers embedded in barcodes. In Jan 2010, retirees with an indefinite expiration date on their card can request a new card without a printed Social Security number. Family member cards will change when they are renewed. To find the nearest ID Card center, visit the RAPIDS site locator at [www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl/owa/home](http://www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl/owa/home).

**News Line for "Non-Wired" Retirees.** A toll-free telephone news line has been set up for Air Force retirees and surviving spouses who do not have computer access. Callers to 1-800-558-1404 can stay informed on a variety of topics compiled from various electronic news sources. Subjects include pay and annuity matters, health care, ID cards renewal and other benefits and entitlements. The news line joins the e-Afterburner and Air Force Retiree News Service in

providing current news and information to the retiree community. All are linked to the Air Force Retiree web site at [www.retirees.af.mil](http://www.retirees.af.mil).

**When A Surviving Spouse Dies.** Family members should notify DFAS at 1-800-321-1080 if the surviving spouse was receiving an annuity for the Survivor Benefit Plan, Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan, Retired Serviceman's Family Protection Plan or "Forgotten Widows" payment. If the survivor was a civil service retiree or receiving an annuity from the federal government, notify the Office of Personnel Management at 1-800-767-6738. If the survivor was receiving Dependency and Indemnity Compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs, contact that agency at 1-800-827-1000.

**Retiree Remarriage.** There are several options available to a retiree participating in SBP for spouse or spouse and child coverage when the spouse is lost through death, divorce or annulment, and the member later remarries (unless former spouse coverage is part of a divorce). The member can either:

1. Resume the prior level of spouse coverage.
2. Elect not to resume spouse SBP coverage. This will not affect child coverage, if any.
3. If the original election was for reduced coverage, the retiree may request that the base amount be increased up to and including full retired pay. If this option is elected, the retiree must pay the difference.

The retiree **must** notify DFAS, US Military Retirement Pay, PO Box 7130, London, KY 40742-7130 of the desired election **within one year of the new marriage** or option 1 automatically takes effect the date the new spouse becomes an eligible beneficiary. DFAS should be promptly notified of the remarriage to avoid a large debt from unpaid premiums. **Remember: getting a military dependent ID card and entering the new spouse in DEERS does not update your pay records at DFAS.**

**Air Force Still Seeking Special Compensation Claimants.** According to Mr. Rick Castro, Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) program manager for the Air Force at the AFPC, the approval rate of claims is currently running 66 percent; however, the program is still not attracting a third of eligible people. AFPC officials expected an increase in claims when the benefit was expanded to include all combat or combat-related disabilities rated as service-connected by the VA at 10 percent or higher. The staff believes the lack of participation may be because many retired Airmen have still not heard about the program or perhaps people are confusing the CRSC criteria with that of Concurrent Retirement Disability Payments. "When in doubt – apply," said Mr. Castro. "It may very well be the key to receiving additional tax-free money. I encourage all who meet the basic eligibility criteria to apply and let the experienced staff make the decision." In determining eligibility, retired military members should answer the following questions:

1. Am I receiving retired military pay?
2. Do I have a compensable VA disability of 10 percent or higher?
3. Is my retired military pay offset by VA disability payments (VA waiver)?

All military retirees apply for CRSC to their own branch of service using DD Form 2860.

Air Force  
US Air Force Personnel Center  
Disability Division (DPPDC)  
550 C Street West, Suite 6  
Randolph AFB TX 78150-4708  
1-800-616-3775

Army  
Department of the Army  
US Army Physical Disability Agency  
Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC)  
200 Stovall Street  
Alexandria, VA 22332-0470  
1-866-281-3254

Navy and Marine Corps  
Secretary of the Navy Council of Review Boards  
ATTN: Combat-Related Special Compensation Branch  
720 Kennon St SE Suite 309  
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5023

1-877-366-2772

**Eligibility Certificates Vital to SBP Annuitants.** Survivor Benefit Plan annuitants are sent a Certificate of Eligibility each year about 60 to 90 days before their birthday to ensure their annuity payment is going to the correct account. All annuitants, no matter their age, receive the form. If the COE is not returned to the DFAS within 60 days, another one is sent. If a COE is not received within 90 days of the first mailing, the account will be suspended, according to DFAS officials. The certificates are a good way for DFAS officials to verify annuitant addresses and other vital account information. Annuitants need to complete the form, return it via the postal service or update their online myPay account. If DFAS officials do not receive the completed form by the annuitant's birthday, they will assume the annuitant is no longer eligible and suspend SBP payments. DFAS officials will restart the suspended payments as soon as they receive the completed form verifying eligibility. For more details, call DFAS at 1-800-321-1080.

**Volunteering Increases Life Expectancy.** Results of a new study provide more evidence that participating in volunteer activities may add years to an older person's life. In a study of US retirees, researchers found that volunteering significantly reduced the chances of dying over a four-year period. Volunteering, the investigators say, may improve health outcomes by expanding retirees' social networks, increasing their access to resources and improving their sense of self-worth. In the study, Dr Sei J. Lee and colleagues from the VA Medical Center and University of California examined 6,360 retirees older than age 65 who enrolled in the Health and Retirement Study in 2002. As part of the study, the men and women whose average age was 78 years were asked: "Have you spent any time in the past 12 months doing volunteer work for religious, educational, health-related or other charitable organizations?" Lee and colleagues found that volunteering was strongly associated with lower death rates, with 12 percent of 1766 volunteers dying by 2006 compared to 26 percent of 4,594 non-volunteers. Even after adjusting for numerous factors that could influence the results volunteering remained strongly correlated with lower death rates. Help yourself and help Tinker by volunteering. You can volunteer in the Retiree Activities Office, the Tinker Clinic or the DEERS/ID office. Call 405-739-2795.

**Tricare University Offers Benefit Education.** If you are new to Tricare and eager to learn about your health care benefits or an old hand who wants to know the latest changes, Tricare University is the place to go. Tricare University offers free online courses 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year at [www.tricare.mil/tricareu](http://www.tricare.mil/tricareu). "The courses can be taken any time and you can learn at your own pace," said Rear Adm Christine Hunter, Deputy Director of the Tricare Management Activity. "It's the simplest way to learn about your Tricare benefit." Of the different courses online, the Tricare Public Course provides the quickest and easiest way to get a general overview and basic knowledge of Tricare programs. There is no registration for this course and it is accessible to anyone who wants to know more about Tricare. To take one of the offered courses, go to [www.tricare.mil/tricareu](http://www.tricare.mil/tricareu) and click on "online training" for a list of options.

**Disabled Veterans' Benefits.** The VA provides a range of benefits for veterans. However, certain benefits have been specifically created to assist disabled veterans. Disability compensation provides a monthly cash benefit to veterans whose disabilities resulted from injury or disease contracted in or aggravated by military service. The amount is based on the level of disability. The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program is designed to help veterans with service-connected disabilities prepare for, find, and keep suitable jobs. Assistance is also available to help veterans with living skills. Automobile and special adaptive equipment grants are available to certain disabled veterans and service members to purchase new or used automobiles to accommodate a disability. Clothing allowances are designed for certain veterans entitled to receive compensation for a service-connected disability for which he or she used a prosthetic or orthopedic device. Housing grants are provided for constructing an adapted home or modifying an existing home to meet the adaptive needs of certain veterans and service members. There are three grant programs are also available for temporary residences. Service

Disabled Veterans' Insurance (S-DVI) is life insurance for veterans who have received a service-connected disability rating by the VA. 1-800-827-1000

**Department of Veterans Affairs Burial Benefits.** Retirees are entitled to certain burial benefits from the VA which vary according to status. Gravesites **cannot** be reserved in advance and families are encouraged to prepare in advance by discussing cemetery options and collecting the veteran's military information. The Funeral Director will make the arrangements with the cemetery. The VA will provide a gravesite, grave liner, headstone or marker, Presidential Memorial Certificate, US Flag, perpetual care and will open and close the grave. Other expenses must be paid by the family. Military honors must be arranged in advance by the family through the funeral director. VA 1-800-827-1000 Grave markers: 1-800-697-6947

**Military Funeral Honors.** Federal law mandates rendering of Military Funeral Honors for eligible veterans, **if requested by the family**. At least two representatives, one from the parent service of the deceased will perform flag folding and presentation and the playing of Taps. Arrangements must be made by the Funeral Director. DOD has prepared an information kit, which contains a military service directory for each state. Funeral directors can access it at: [www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil](http://www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil). Tinker Honor Guard number is 734-4226.

**Retiree Publications.** The following service connected publications are available online:

Air Force <i>Afterburner</i>	<a href="http://www.retirees.af.mil/afterburner">http://www.retirees.af.mil/afterburner</a>
Army <i>Echoes</i>	<a href="http://www.armyg1.army.mil/RSO/echoes.asp">http://www.armyg1.army.mil/RSO/echoes.asp</a>
Navy <i>Shift Colors</i>	<a href="http://www.npc.navy.mil/referencelibrary/publications/shiftcolors">http://www.npc.navy.mil/referencelibrary/publications/shiftcolors</a>
Marine Corps <i>Semper Fidelis</i>	<a href="http://www.manpower.usmc.mil/portal/page?_pageid=278,2017336&amp;_dad=portal&amp;_schema=PORTAL">http://www.manpower.usmc.mil/portal/page?_pageid=278,2017336&amp;_dad=portal&amp;_schema=PORTAL</a>

**Military Star Card Gas Discount to Increase by 60%.** AAFES gas stations worldwide are helping take the pain out of the pump by increasing discounts for drivers using a Military Star Card to 5 cents a gallon. In addition to the everyday nickel discount, AAFES will periodically be offering increased savings opportunities at specified times throughout the year. "The savings opportunities are going to be unprecedented," said AAFES CEO Mike Howard.

**The Vanwey Dining Facility.** Retirees and family members are authorized to dine at the Vanwey Dining Facility at Tinker AFB on all holidays and every Friday. Everyone must pay the standard rate for their meals. Contact the Food Service Officer at 734-8148.

**The Tinker Exchange.** Want to know about in store special sales or events at the Tinker Exchange? Sign up for the Exchange Buddy List. Just send your email address to [johnsonrt@aafes.com](mailto:johnsonrt@aafes.com) or call 734-3700. Currently, Class Six and Shoppettes offer a 10% discount on wine and liquor bought by the case. The Manchu Wok is serving great Chinese food at the Food Court. The Food Court can cater your party by matching any off base price and adding an additional 10% discount. Call 734-8650. Support the troops overseas with prepaid phone cards or Gifts from the Homeland. Info at [www.aafes.com](http://www.aafes.com).

**CAUTION: Cell Phone Restrictions for Drivers.** Drivers are not allowed to talk or text on their cell phones while driving on Air Force installations without a hands free device.

**The Tinker Retiree Newsletter is available online at [www.tinker.af.mil](http://www.tinker.af.mil).**

DISCLAIMER: Information contained in this Newsletter does not necessarily reflect the position of the Air Force or that of Tinker AFB. The Retiree Newsletter is published by Tinker AFB Retiree Activities Office (RAO) to inform retirees and family members of changes in legislation, defense policies, and other matters affecting their military rights, benefits and obligations. It also contains information about Tinker AFB and the local community. While every effort is made to verify information in this newsletter, the RAO staff cannot guarantee the accuracy of information furnished by outside agencies.